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| **Members** | | **Attending Via** |
| Ms Vicki Rundle PSM (Chair) | Deputy Secretary, Veterans and Families Services | In person |
| Ms Natasha Cole (Deputy Chair) | First Assistant Secretary, Client Benefits Division | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Graeme Bland | Air Force Association | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Allan Thomas OAM | Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans’ Association | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Clem Russell OAM | Royal Australian Regiment Corporation (RARC) | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr John Burrows | Australian Special Air Service Association (ASASA) | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr John King | Returned and Services League of Australia | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr John McNeill | Australian Veterans Alliance | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Robert Connor | Legacy Australia Inc | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Ray Kemp OAM | Naval Association of Australia (NAA) | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Rona Lunney | Partners of Veterans Association (PVA) | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Max Ball | Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Pat McCabe OAM | TPI Federation Australia | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Bill Roberts OAM | Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Rhondda Vanzella OAM | Australian War Widows Inc | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Kerry Mellor | Defence Force Welfare Association | Microsoft Teams |
| **Presenters** | |  |
| Ms Carly Partridge | Assistant Secretary, Community Policy Branch (item 5) | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Moira Campbell | Assistant Secretary, Client Access and Rehabilitation Branch (item 7) | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Rachel Goddard | First Assistant Secretary, Commemorations & Transformation Division (item 8) | Microsoft Teams |
| **Observers** | |  |
| Ms Danielle Cunningham | Director, Advocacy Policy Section (item 5) | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Alison Hale | Community Policy Branch (Item 5) | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Gwen Collins | A/g Assistant Secretary, Channel Strategy & Digital Delivery (item 8) | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Glen Yeomans | Director, MyService (item 8) | Microsoft Teams |
| **Secretariat** | |  |
| Ms Tiki Stephens | Assistant Director, Governance and Ministerial Events Section | Microsoft Teams |
| Mr Lachlan Dunk | Senior Secretariat Officer, Governance and Ministerial Events Section | Microsoft Teams |
| Ms Victoria Anthony | Secretariat Officer, Governance and Ministerial Events Section – Tech Support | Microsoft Teams |

# Agenda Item 1 Welcome and Strategic Update

The Chair opened the meeting welcomed members. The Chair was commended for providing a strategic update. The Chair noted the escalating situation in Afghanistan was of significant importance and causing difficulties for both current and former defence force personnel and that it is a priority for DVA to facilitate as much support as possible for those affected by the situation in Afghanistan. The Chair acknowledged the Covid-19 pandemic is adding to difficulties in providing support to those in need. The Chair encouraged members to be alert and to reach out to anyone they suspect of being adversely affected by the situation.

DVA has contacted the families of the 41 ADF personnel who lost their lives in Afghanistan and it was stressed that members who deployed to Afghanistan should be proud of their service and that it has not gone unnoticed by the nation. The Chair updated members on the meeting the Minister recently had with ESORT and YVF and noted the Minister found the meetings very informative. The Minister has since requested to engage with education ministers regarding raising awareness of the impacts of the situation in Afghanistan on the children of current and former ADF personnel.

The department has sent over 200,000 text messages to stakeholders potentially affected by the situation in Afghanistan and there has been increased social media activities (such as special button on DVA website) and additional resources for school teachers to give them with an understanding of the potential impact on children of ADF personnel. The Chair proceeded to update members regarding information on the Royal Commission into veteran suicide and advised members that DVA is continuing to provide support to those affected by this matter. The Royal Commission interim report is expected to be released in August 2022 and the final report is expected to be completed in June 2023.

The Chair provided an update on the status of claims processing, noting the department has experienced unprecedented growth which has led to the backlog. The Department had received funding in the budget to address the issue and that DVA has undertaken extensive recruitment, however, one of the issues DVA is facing is time taken to train delegates. The Chair assured members that in addition to recruitment, DVA is investigating how processes can be streamlined and that efficiencies have already been created. Members were encouraged to provide any ideas regarding this matter. Members were updated on the status of the Veteran Wellbeing Centres, of which three are currently operational and the remaining centres are on track to be operational by 2022.

Members thanked DVA for its work in providing educational materials to schools and inquired regarding separated/divorced families and if there are any additional supports for those situations. The Deputy Chair advised that partners of separated veterans are eligible for counselling supports being offered in response to the Afghanistan situation but that no additional compensation payment would be offered.

# Agenda Item 2 Minutes and actions of previous meeting

Members endorsed the Minutes of the 21 April 2021 meeting and noted that they will be published on the DVA website. Members requested an update on action item O2020/0123 and requested additional information on the total number of claims submitted through MyService as well as a breakdown between successful and unsuccessful claims (on the basis of IL).

Members agreed that the following actions can be closed:

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| O37 | O2021/003 | O2021/008 | O2021/016 |
| O2020/0121 | O2021/004 | O2021/011 | O2021/017 |
| O2020/0122 | O2021/005 | O2021/012 | O2021/018 |
| O2021/001 | O2021/006 | O2021/013 |  |
| O2021/002 | O2021/007 | O2021/015 |  |

Members agreed that the following actions would remain open or in progress: O90, O2020/0123, O2020/0125, O2021/010, O2021/014, O2021/019.

# Agenda Item 3 Update on claims processing/claims statistics

The Deputy Chair shared a presentation that had previously been presented to the Minister, providing in-depth information on the status of work being undertaken to address the backlog of claims processing.

An update on the steps being undertaken by DVA to improve compensation claims processing and to reduce the backlog of claims was provided to Members. DVA has received a significant increase in compensation claims. The Deputy Chair further clarified that the claims data in the presentation does not include statistics related to income support claims.

Members expressed frustration at the format of the meeting and recommended that going forward, OWP should focus on the work of advocates, complicated claims matters as well as broader discussions about the complexities of the claims process. It was agreed that a paper be drafted to discuss the format of OWP and how it could be changed to be more participant based. It was suggested that the model of the Multi-Act claim group might be more appropriate for the OWP forum rather than the existing model, however, members expressed concerns with the multi-act working group suggesting the membership should be comprised mainly with representatives who are advocates (as opposed to non-advocate Ex-Service Organisation representatives). Certain members however noted the importance of continued involvement all existing members of OWP and the multi-act working group, regardless of whether they are a claims advocates. The Deputy Chair recommended that it may be beneficial to note the composition of members in forums on the basis of claims advocates and “well-being” advocates. Linked to this, certain members expressed concern regarding dissemination of information from ESORT meetings.

Members were advised by the Deputy Chair that their concerns will be raised with the Chair and potential options for changes to the format of OWP will be investigated, noting any recommendations will take time to implement.

Members were advised and agreed that a proposal to reshape the format of the OWP agenda, to focus on issues raised by advocates and members (as opposed to the Department), will be presented to the Chair. The Deputy Chair noted any changes to membership of OWP would need to be discussed with the Chair and the Terms of Reference would need to be redrafted. Members expressed the view that the agenda items for OWP forums should consist of the submissions made by members prior to the meeting.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action / Decision*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **O2021/021** | Draft a paper on proposed changes to OWP format | Secretariat & Natasha Cole |
| **O2021/022** | Draft a paper on proposed changes to the OWP Terms of Reference, specifically on OWP membership | Secretariat & Natasha Cole |

The Deputy Chair resumed the presentation of the Claims Deep Dive, noting that additional funding received in the budget has allowed the department to convert 270 labour hire staff to non-going APS staff. Additional funding has also been received to hire another 120 contractors to address the claims backlog. Calculations for increases to permanent staff are based off of forecast ongoing increases in claims numbers and funding for temporary staff is based on the claims backlog.

Members enquired as to whether changes in the funding represented an increase in total staff or only a transfer from a contracted workforce to an APS workforce. The Deputy Chair confirmed that funding would result in overall increases in staff. Members also inquired regarding the allocation of the additional 120 staff. The Deputy Chair advised members that MRCA IL would be receiving the biggest increase in staff.

# Agenda Item 4 Report Back – Multi-Act Working Group (O2020/0123)

Item was addressed during update of Agenda item 9.

# Agenda Item 5 ATDP Governance and re-accreditation

Members were provided with an update on the ATDP governance changes and reaccreditation of the *Course in Military Advocacy.* Members sought to clarify whether advocates will need to undergo reaccreditation. It was confirmed that that is not the case.

Members were advised that DVA’s Advocacy Policy section has organised workshops for advocates to provide feedback. Members enquired as to whether the reaccreditation process will have an impact on the status of volunteers and paid advocates. Ms Partridge advised members the changes being implemented will not have an impact on level 4 advocates.

Members enquired regarding certification under Training and Information Program (TIP) and whether the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process is going to be streamlined any further. Certain parts of the RPL process are requirements under the Australian Skills Quality Authority and the Department would still subcontract to a Registered Training Organisation to complete the accreditation process.

Members enquired as to whether the special rate level 4 advocacy course will be updated. Members were davised that the ATDP has not yet developed an updated level 4 advocacy course as there has not been a significant demand from ESOs. Members expressed concern regarding the upcoming cessation (31 December 2021) of insurance coverage for advocates accredited under TIP by the Veterans’ Indemnity and Training Association (VITA), which is a standalone organisation independent of DVA and that any concerns would need to be raised with VITA directly.

Members were concerned with the size of the advocacy workforce and DVA acknowledged that this was concern was reflected in the findings of the advocacy scoping study report. The Deputy Chair recommended that OWP forums going forward have a standing agenda item regarding the ATDP as well as a broader discussion regarding the future of advocacy.

# Agenda Item 6 Simplification and Improvement of DVA forms

No update was provided for this item.

# Agenda Item 7 Staff contact during out of office hours (O2021/011)

Members raised concerns regarding contact hours via telephone for DVA, specifically in WA, with one member advising that WA-based veterans were unable to call until after 8:30am AWST. It was acknowledged that there was a technical glitch associated with the 1800 VETERAN number which affected callers based in WA, but that it has now been rectified. A decision was made to standardise hours of access for the 1800 VETERAN number to be Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm in the caller’s local time zone, as this would result in the most equitable access.

# Agenda Item 8 Changes to MyAccount/MyService Transport claims

No update was provided for this item.

# Agenda Item 9 Other Business

Members were provided with an update regarding processes for offsetting ComSuper Payments and Incapacity Payments. The Deputy Chair noted the offsetting issue has been of interest to the multi-act working group and that the duration of the multi-act working group has been extended.

Issues raised by the multi-act working group included cases being inappropriately referred to internal and external reviews as well as recommendations to simplify AFI requirements. DVA is considering the group’s recommendation to include wording on MyService encouraging clients seek the support of an advocate when submitting a claim.

Incapacity payments were discussed, noting that depending on the act under which incapacity payments are paid (MRCA or DRCA) as well as any ComSuper arrangements (Class A or B) can result in complexities regarding calculation of payment arrangements. It was noted that changes to an individual’s CSC arrangements can result in overpayments and the Department is testing how to manage the work in incapacity payments in order to better deliver services for clients.

Members enquired as to whether there is overlap between tax withheld of ComSuper Payments and DVA Incapacity Payments. Members were advised that CSC payments and DVA incapacity payments are taxed at different rates and that DVA is working with ATO regarding completing retrospective adjustments.

Members enquired in relation to instances where clients are receiving multiple payments for the same injury. Related to this, was an enquiry in relation to offsetting that was applied to a particular client in receipt of Incapacity payments, ComSuper payments as well as a lump sum under DRCA, and whether reductions applied were valid. The Deputy Chair advised that this matter should be followed up out of session.

Members raised the issue that certain clients eligible for MRCA SRDP are unaware of the fact that accepting lump sum payouts under MRCA will reduce their ongoing SRDP payments. Members were advised that the Department is in the process of developing media videos to help provide clients important information to consider when accessing entitlements, i.e., “things you should know about incapacity payments”. Members expressed support for this approach.

Members enquired as to whether a video could be made explaining the difference between a psychosocial rehabilitation plan and a return to work rehabilitation plan. Members suggested videos should be made to address less well known factors to consider when accessing entitlements such as time limits in place to elect to receive a lump sum payout or periodic payments. Members expressed the view that development of these videos should be a joint effort between advocates and the Department and that consideration should be given to designing materials to help assist advocates.

Members raised concerns regarding DVA De-facto forms and whether certain questions are necessary to include. Members asked that the forms be reviewed and that this work be incorporated into the letters improvement project. Members requested for DVA to look into ceasing automatic mail-out of any De-facto forms. The Deputy Chair advised members that this would need be investigated as there may be IT system issues that prevent DVA from automatically ceasing the dispatch of these forms.

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| ***No.*** | ***Action / Decision*** | ***Assigned to*** |
| **O2021/023** | Ceasing automatic mail out of DVA De-facto Relationship forms | Clients Benefits Division |
| **O2021/024** | Review of De-facto questionnaire form | Clients Benefits Division |

**Below The Line**

**BTL Item 1 Provision of Treatment Cycle Independent Review (QUT)**

Members noted the For Information paper provided.

**BTL Item 2 Increased visibility to OWP members regarding work of Letters Improvement Team**

Members noted the For Information paper provided.

**BTL Item 3 Clarification of policy surrounding prioritisation criteria**

Members noted the For Information paper provided.

**BTL Item 4 Amendments to Medical Impairment Forms**

Members noted the For Information paper provided.

**BTL Item 5 Interstate travel to attend ATDP training**

Members noted the For Information paper provided.

**BTL Item 6 Defence/DVA Links Steering Committee update from 1 April 2021**

Members noted the For Information paper provided.

The meeting closed at 1:00 pm.